

**STATEMENT OF
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COMMANDER
MILITARY SEALIFT COMMAND
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
ON
THE REAUTHORIZATION OF
THE MARITIME ADMINISTRATION
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COMMERCE COMMITTEE**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. I am VADM Gordon Holder, Commander of the Military Sealift Command (MSC). It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to appear before you today. Before addressing issues related to the U.S. Merchant Marine Fleet and manpower needs, I would like to provide a brief overview of MSC and how its mission fits into our National Military Strategy.

The Military Sealift Command has four vital global missions:

1st: we provide combat ready logistics ships for the underway replenishment of fuel, ammunition and supplies to our Navy fleets around the world -- a critical enabler of our Navy's ability to maintain a combat-credible forward presence in regions of national interest throughout the world. We also provide ships for related support services such as the hospital ships and ocean going tugs;

2nd: we provide special mission ships to support DoD and various civilian agencies in the national security arena, including oceanographic research, ocean surveillance, missile tracking and submarine rescue;

3rd: in support of the military services we provide prepositioned ships which are stationed in three strategic areas and are combat loaded for deterrence and rapid response in any contingency; and

4th: using specialized ships we provide ocean transportation -- strategic sealift-- of heavy military equipment to sustain U.S. forces worldwide during peacetime and in war for as long as operational requirements dictate.

On an average day approximately 112 ships are deployed and actively involved with fulfilling MSC's four missions -- providing what we at MSC like to refer to as "Logistics . . . From the Sea".

All MSC ships, unlike other U.S. Navy ships, are crewed by merchant mariners. As a result, MSC is the single largest employer of U.S. merchant mariners. MSC directly employs 3,200 civil service seagoing mariners who primarily operate the combat logistics force ships. In addition, MSC's ship charters and ship operating contracts are responsible for the employment of 1,900 additional private sector merchant mariners.

Numerous international crises in the 1990s have underscored the vital role of the Military Sealift Command as a major contributor in the execution of our national strategy. During the Persian Gulf War, MSC distinguished itself as the largest source of defense transportation of any nation involved. Command resources were tasked to deliver more than 12 million tons of wheeled and tracked vehicles, helicopters, ammunition, dry cargo, fuel and other supplies and equipment. More than 230 ships, both

U.S. government-owned and chartered commercial vessels, virtually all crewed by commercially employed merchant mariners, delivered and returned more than 95 percent of the international arsenal required to meet military requirements in the Gulf.

In more recent events, MSC's combat logistics ships, crewed by MSC's workforce of civil service mariners, supported Navy operations in the Persian Gulf, and our surge sealift assets provided resupply cargo to U.S. forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 1999, two of MSC's large, medium-speed roll-on/roll-off ships, USNS Soderman and USNS Bob Hope, carried combat equipment and supplies for U.S. peacekeeping forces in Kosovo. Also in 1999, a privately owned ship chartered to MSC, MV Capt. Steven L. Bennett, delivered prepositioned U.S. Air Force ammunition to support air operations over Kosovo. All three ships, Soderman, Bob Hope and Bennett, were operated by commercial mariners.

These operations have highlighted the critical contribution made by MSC's ships and mariners to our Navy's efforts to operate from the littoral seas to directly and decisively influence events ashore. These responses by MSC and Navy units, throughout a spectrum from peacetime through a crisis and into war, have made a direct contribution to promoting a framework of regional security and stability that supports our national interests

In addition to meeting military contingency and peacekeeping requirements, our sealift assets proved invaluable in natural disasters and humanitarian relief efforts by transporting vast quantities of construction supplies and equipment for victims in stricken countries. When Hurricane George hit the Caribbean, MSC joined in to help Puerto Rico and other nearby islands return to normal. We used one of MSC's Fast Sealift Ships, USNS Algol, and chartered space aboard the U.S.-flag ship MV Seacor Clipper, to transport construction equipment and disaster relief supplies. Again, both Algol and Seacor Clipper were crewed by private sector commercial mariners.

Four Maritime Administration (MARAD) Ready Reserve Force (RRF) Ships, under MSC operational control, transported equipment and supplies needed to help rebuild roads and bridges that were destroyed by the torrential rains following the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch. The RRF ship MV Cape Vincent was the first to arrive in Corinto, Nicaragua carrying heavy construction equipment, trucks and tractors. The RRF ships MV Cape Ducato, MV Cape Edmont and MV Cape Victory carried additional construction material to the Central America region. Our success with these humanitarian relief operations reflects the increased usefulness of the RRF. All of the

RRF ships are crewed by private sector commercial merchant mariners.

We rely extensively on our commercial partners to support our worldwide transportation requirements in peace and war. In peacetime, we ship more than 1.6 million measurement tons of DOD cargo using privately owned U.S. flag ships crewed by private sector U.S. merchant mariners. In wartime we also depend on the private sector merchant marine workforce to crew MSC's surge sealift and prepositioning fleet, as well as MARAD's RRF.

Currently, four RRF ships are being used as MSC prepositioned assets. They include: SS Gopher State, an auxiliary crane ship with four 30-ton cranes stationed in Guam; SS Cape Jacob, a breakbulk ship prepositioned with Navy munitions; and two offshore petroleum discharge system tankers, SS Potomac and SS Petersburg, which are capable of delivering fuel from four miles offshore over undeveloped beaches. The RRF contains an additional 86 ships maintained in a four-, five-, 10- or 20-day readiness status to fulfill part of our surge sealift requirements. The RRF includes roll-on/roll-off cargo ships, breakbulk ships, barge carriers, auxiliary crane ships, tankers and two troop ships for surge sealift requirements. Because of their configurations, RRF ships are uniquely capable of handling bulky, oversized military equipment. In both prepositioning status and when activated, these ships are crewed by U.S. merchant mariners employed by commercial ship operating companies. The use of ships in these examples, plus the no-notice activation exercises conducted over the past ten years, has proven the reliability and readiness of the RRF.

Shipboard automation and increased productivity of modern containerships have resulted in shrinking numbers of seafarers in the commercial seagoing industry. Not only has the size of the ships' crew decreased, but the number of U.S. flag ocean-going ships has also decreased. The overall result has been a smaller pool of mariners than existed in the past. Given our mission and operations, the issue of merchant mariner availability has been a concern to me since I took Command of MSC over one year ago. MSC continuously looks for ways to improve both recruitment and retention of mariners. For example, in September 1999, after evaluating MSC's experience with seagoing manpower requirements and retention rates, we expanded a program for entry-level civil service mariners that provides training to ordinary seaman so they can advance to the able-bodied seaman rating. Our effort in grooming our entry level seamen for advancement has resulted in better trained personnel and higher employee satisfaction, thus aiding in retention of MSC's sea-going workforce.

Because MSC relies so heavily on the commercial merchant marine to meet our mission, I am concerned that MSC's difficulty in recruiting and retaining a professional cadre of civil service merchant mariners also extends to the U.S. commercial merchant fleet. As we have observed in other areas of our national workforce, including the military services, the United States' robust economic environment and the availability of employment opportunities in less arduous careers makes attracting and maintaining an adequate merchant mariner workforce a significant challenge.

As the executive agent for the National Defense Transportation Association's (NDTA) Military Sealift Committee, I worked with the committee's Chairman, Mr. Jim Henry, to form a working group charged with assessing our nation's ability to meet the crewing demand required to support a national sealift mobilization. The group, comprised of ship operators and maritime and labor experts, quickly started evaluating the issue and conducted in-depth discussions with the Maritime Administration and the U.S. Coast Guard.

The study has recently been completed. It identifies potential mariner shortages that are now being analyzed. Additionally, the Working Group is reviewing the impact the requirements of the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) will have on the training of our mariners to ensure we meet international maritime standards. This is necessary to improve our professional standards and enhance our mariner forces. While the Working Group has developed numerous ideas for increasing the availability of both licensed and unlicensed mariners, the work continues and we are not yet at the point when we can present coordinated concrete recommendations.

I am pleased to report to you that we have an excellent relationship among the U.S. Transportation Command, MSC, MARAD, the U.S. Coast Guard and our maritime transportation industry and labor partners. We mutually have the correct concern and commitment to identify solutions to this merchant marine manning challenge.

Thank you again for this opportunity to appear before the committee. I am ready to answer any questions you may have.

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